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ABSTRACT

This leaflet provides, in question-answer form, information about working mothers and their families, including individual characteristics and types of work. (BH)

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Who are the Working Mothers?

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WOMEN'S BUREAU FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
WOMANPOWER—A NATIONAL RESOURCE

Women's Bureau, WAGE AND LABOR STANDARDS ADMINISTRATION, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The American woman, as part of a changing world, not only performs her basic role within the family unit but also assumes other obligations that are necessitated by the times in which she lives and by a sense of responsibility to the community as well as to her family. Today's woman is faced with new problems and new challenges. For many women, including those who have children, new life patterns include paid employment, although such work may be intermittent or on a part-time basis.

Among the 29.9 million women who were working or seeking work in March 1969 were 11.6 million mothers with children under 18 years of age. About 7.4 million of these working mothers had children 6 to 17 years of age only (none under 6), 2.1 million had children 3 to 5 years of age (none under 3), and another 2.1 million had children under 3 years of age.

Since the period immediately preceding World War II, the number of women workers has more than doubled, but the number of working mothers has increased almost eightfold. About 4 out of 10 mothers were in the labor force in March 1969 as compared with less than 1 out of 10 in 1940.

The growing movement of women into paid employment, with its implications for family life and society, has focused a great deal of attention on the circumstances of women's working, particularly if there are young children in the family.

Why do mothers of young children work? For the great majority of working women with young children, economic need is the most compelling reason. This need, in large measure, is determined by the husband's earnings and the regularity of his employment. The higher his earnings, and the greater the security afforded by his job, the less likely the wife is to work. In homes left fatherless by death, divorce, or separation, the compulsion on a mother to seek work is obviously great. Her earnings are not supplementary; they are basic to the maintenance of her family. In this most affluent of nations, 32 percent of all families headed by a woman lived in poverty in 1968; many other such families had incomes barely above the poverty line.

There are, of course, other factors that influence a mother's decision to seek work. These include the jobs in the community available to one with her education, training, or skills and the hours she would be required to be on the job. Mothers with young children have a strong preference for part-time or part-year jobs.

In the final analysis, the decision whether to work outside the home rests with each mother. She may feel the choice is forced upon her, as in the case of critical financial necessity. But the choice is still her own in a society that puts great value on self-determination by the individual and on the individual's right to exercise free choice.

As background material for those engaged in studies or discussions pertaining to working mothers, the Women's Bureau has provided, through the questions and answers that follow, information on the status of working mothers and on the factors that motivate them to seek paid employment.

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ABOUT WORKING MOTHERS*. . .

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS In brief	In detail
NUMBER AND PROPORTION		
1. Of all women workers, what proportion have children under 18 years of age?	Almost two-fifths (39 percent) at the time of the most recent estimate in March 1969.	Mothers constituted a fourth of the total woman labor force** in 1950. Their proportion of the total was only a tenth in 1940.
2. How does the present number of working mothers compare with earlier years?	The 11.6 million working mothers in March 1969 was the highest number ever recorded.	Only 4.6 million mothers were in the Nation's labor force in 1950; only 1.5 million, in 1940.
3. Of all mothers in the population, what proportion work outside the home?	About two-fifths.	By comparison, only a fifth were in the labor force in 1950; only a tenth, in 1940.
AGE		
4. What is the median age of working mothers?	Thirty-seven years, only slightly below the 39-year median age for all women workers.	Of every 10 working mothers, 3 are 25 to 34 years old and almost 4 are 35 to 44 years old.
MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN		
5. Does the presence of young children in the family affect a mother's decision whether to seek employment outside the home?	Yes. The percentage of mothers who work is relatively low in families with young children.	Among families with children under 3 years of age, only 26 percent of the mothers were in the labor force in March 1969. For mothers with children between 3 and 5 years of age (none under 3 years), the proportion was 37 percent. Of mothers with children 6 to 17 years of age only, 51 percent were workers.
6. Why do some mothers with young children work outside the home?	Usually because they need the money that their earnings provide.	Many families cannot manage without the mother's earnings. Of all working mothers with children under 6 years of age in March 1969, one-third were either widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands or had husbands whose incomes in 1968 were below $5,000.
7. How many working mothers have children under 6 years of age?	More than 1 out of 3.	In March 1969, 4.2 million working mothers had children under 6 years of age, and half of these workers had children under 3 years of age.
8. How many young children have working mothers?	In 1965, 10.9 million children under 12 years of age had mothers who worked.	About 4.5 million of these children were under 6 years of age (2 million under 3 years of age).
NEGRO* MOTHERS**		
9. How many working mothers are Negro?	About 1.7 million as of March 1969.	Some 917,000 Negro working mothers had children 6 to 17 years of age only, and 750,000 had children under 6 years of age.

*"Mothers," as used in this leaflet, refers to women with children under 18 years of age, unless otherwise designated.

**Beginning January 1967, "labor force" refers to persons 16 years of age and over who are either employed or seeking work. Previously it referred to persons 14 years of age and over.

***Negro and other races (except white).

10. How does the labor force participation rate of Negro mothers compare with that of white mothers?

It is considerably higher, particularly when there are young children in the family.

Sixty-two percent of Negro mothers with children 6 to 17 years of age only and 45 percent of those with children under 6 years of age were in the labor force in March 1969. The comparable proportions for white mothers were 50 percent and 28 percent, respectively.

CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

11. What arrangements do working mothers make for child care?

Nearly half of all children under 12 years of age are cared for in their own homes. Only a small percentage receive group care.

In February 1965, 47 percent of the children under 6 years of age were looked after in their own homes and 31 percent were cared for in someone else's home. Twenty-two percent were cared for by other arrangements, but only 6 percent received group care in child care centers or similar facilities. Of the children 6 to 11 years of age, 47 percent were looked after in their own homes, 11 percent received care in someone else's home, and about 42 percent were cared for by other arrangements. At least 8 percent of the older children looked after themselves, and only 1 percent received group care.

12. Is a mother more inclined to seek employment if female relatives are members of her household?

Yes, particularly if she has young children and a female relative is available to look after them during the mother's absence from home.

In families with children under 6 years of age, 35 percent of the mothers with husband present worked in March 1969 when a female relative lived with the family. The proportion was only 28 percent for mothers who did not have such assistance.

MOTHERS WITH HUSBAND PRESENT IN THE HOME

13. What proportion of working mothers are from homes in which the husband is present?

Eighty-four percent as of March 1969.

About 9.7 million working mothers were from homes where the husband was present. The other 1.9 million were widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands for other reasons.

14. Of all mothers from families in which the husband is present, what proportion work?

Thirty-nine percent as of March 1969. The proportion was 59 percent among other mothers.

In homes where the husband was present, only 29 percent of the mothers with children under 6 years worked. Mothers who are widowed, separated, or divorced are more likely to work than other mothers. In March 1969, 50 percent of the mothers in these categories worked, even when there were young children in the family.

15. How much does her husband's income influence a mother's decision to work?

Far more mothers work outside the home when their husbands' incomes are low than when they are high.

In families where the husbands' incomes were less than $3,000 in 1968, the proportion of mothers in paid employment in March 1969 was 55 percent for those with children 6 to 17 years of age only and 33 percent for those with children under 6 years. When the husbands' incomes were $7,000 or more, the proportions were 45 and 24 percent, respectively.

16. How many working mothers have husbands with incomes below the $3,000 poverty level?

About 1 out of every 12 working mothers (husband present) in 1969.

About 485,000 of these mothers had children 6 to 17 years of age only; the other 281,000 had children under 6 years of age.

17. Does educational attainment affect a mother's decision to work?

Yes. The more education a mother has, the more likely she is to be in the labor force.

The labor force participation in March 1969 of mothers (husband present) with children of school age only ranged from 47 percent among those with less than a high school education to 57 percent among those who were college graduates. The correlation was not as strong among mothers with children under 6, for whom comparable figures were 27 and 32 percent.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

18. Is a mother's decision to work part time or part year influenced by the ages of her children?	Yes. Among working mothers with husband present, the proportion who work full time the year round is lowest among those with children under 3 years of age.	About 33 percent of working mothers with husband present worked 35 hours or more a week and 50 to 52 weeks during 1968. Forty percent of mothers with children 6 to 17 years of age only, but only 17 percent of those with children under 3 years of age, were full-time year-round workers.
19. How do the occupations of working mothers compare with those of other women workers?	Occupations of working mothers are similar, in general, to those of all women workers.	Among every 100 working mothers with husband present, there are 32 clerical workers, 21 service workers, 18 factory operatives, 14 professional workers, 7 sales workers, and 8 in other occupations.

SUGGESTED REFERENCES

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*Available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.
**Available from the Women's Bureau, Wage and Labor Standards Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20210.